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SUBJECT: VOTER REGISTRATION IN ENUGU

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Poloff and Pol assistant traveled to Enugu state in mid-November and met with INEC, the PDP, journalists, and civil society activists to discuss voter registration and the pre-election climate. Voter registration in Enugu was off to a slow start with only 52 of 750 required direct data capture machines operating in the state. Poloffs visited registration sites where machines were functioning well. However, few voters turned out and there was no publicity about where to register. All of our contacts, including the INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), predicted that the registration period would be extended beyond December 14. End Summary.

12. (U) Dr. Abdu Bulama, INEC's Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) for Enugu told Poloff that voter registration was off to a slow start due to lack of the necessary direct data capture (DDC) machines. He reported that Enugu initially received only 12 machines for its 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and 2,959 polling places. By mid-November, Enugu's allotment of machines increased to 52, but this still fell far short of the 750 machines promised to the state. Bulama indicated that there were initially some problems with the software and that the battery life of the machines was only about 4 to 5 hours, rather than the 8 hours touted by headquarters. However, he was pleased that most polling stations were able to enroll around 100 voters per day per machine. Bulama was hopeful that INEC would be given an extension to continue the registration exercise after December 14. Journalists, civil society activists, and the state PDP secretary all expressed similar expectations.

13. (U) Bulama invited Poloff to observe registration at several sites in Enugu. The sites were outdoors, located in schoolyards or parks. There were two ad hoc staff working at each site, and at one registration point there were two police on hand, presumably to provide security. The staff knew how to operate the DDC equipment and we witnessed voters registering and receiving their temporary voters' cards. Since most Nigerian do not possess any reputable form of identification, at the registration center, a voter simply tells the worker his name, age, and address. The worker enters this data into the computer and then captures the voter's fingerprint and photo and prints a temporary registration card. This presents a potential problem, as there is no way to prevent non-citizens or underage citizens from entering the voters roll. Another problem was lack of publicity. There were no signs on the street indicating that registration was taking place at the sites we visited. The pace of activity at all observed sites was low. One site had

registered 30 voters in 5 hours, while another site registered 12 people before its printer ran out of ink.

¶4. (C) There were some indications of politicization in the location of registration machines. Pol assistant overheard the REC (speaking in Hausa on his mobile phone) explaining that he had given one of the new DDC machines to the speaker of the state House of Assembly for the polling place in his ward. John Nwodo Jr., local activist and former cabinet minister, said that he had tried five times to register but was unable to find a DDC machine in his ward. He alleged that of the 3 machines active in his senatorial zone, one was placed in the ward of the local government authority (LGA) chairman, another was in the ward of a National Assembly representative, and the third was in the home ward of the Senator. He claimed that the machines were being used at night to register friends and supporters of politicians and that they were not being rotated amongst the wards as promised by INEC. Nwodo wanted to travel abroad on business, but said he dared not do so until he managed to register, because he feared disenfranchisement.

¶5. (C) Comment: On voter registration, the view from the field is unfortunately the same as the view from Abuja. The exercise is taking place slowly and ineffectively. Information about where and how to register is sorely lacking, causing even connected political activists like Nwodo to fear disenfranchisement. However, no one acts as though the poorly run registration exercise is a crisis. Instead, both the government and civil society seem to accept that the registration period will have to be extended.

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